4.7 Prayer: Being with God

A number of units up to this point have focussed on prayer as an act of the community, particularly in the Sacraments and especially the Eucharist, the great and central prayer of the Church.

In this unit students will explore prayer and ways of praying as a means of developing their prayer life. They will be introduced to experiences of prayer, drawn from the rich Catholic spiritual heritage. Students will explore the place and purpose of prayer and a variety of prayer styles.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Values & Attitudes***Students will demonstrate that they are:* | **Knowledge & Understandings***Students will demonstrate that they can:* | **Skills***Students will demonstrate that they can:* |
| S2.2 attentive to the opportunities in their lives where the actions and teachings of Jesus might be applied | identify the actions and teachings of Jesus | apply the actions and teachings of Jesus to their own lives |
| C2.2 willing to participate in celebrations which reflect the beliefs and traditions of the Catholic Church | describe ways in which the Catholic Church celebrates its beliefs and traditions | investigate ways in which the Catholic Church celebrates its beliefs and traditions |

Syllabus Outcomes
Self/Church – Stage 2

Classroom Outcomes

*Students will be able to:*

* recognise different ways of praying within the Church’s tradition
* describe how praying develops their relationship with God
* compose, read and pray different types of prayer

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Scripture | Doctrine |
| Mark 1:35-38 *Jesus prays*Matthew 18:19-20 *Prayer in common*Luke 10:38-42 *Martha and Mary***Related Scripture** Selected Psalms*Note: It is necessary to do ‘Related’ Scripture, however it is not specifically named but selected by teacher.* | * Prayer is a way we communicate with God
* Prayer is a living relationship with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit
* The Christian Tradition has three main ways of praying: speaking, meditating, contemplating
* The Holy Spirit helps us to pray
* We live our faith through prayer and action
* God communicates with us
 |

Spiritual Reflection for Teachers

How can we get to know each other, if we don't make time to listen and to talk? How can we develop our relationship, if we don't communicate? Remember those occasions when you and another played the "no speaking" game?

Prayer is that "mysterious encounter", the listening and conversing, between God and ourselves. Through prayer, we come to know God better and ourselves as well.

The 14th Century mystic Eckhart, said: "If the only prayer you say in your whole life-time is ‘thank you’ that is enough."

Catechism of the Catholic Church

**Excerpts from the Catechism of the Catholic Church are included below as information for teachers. They present the Church’s teachings contained in this unit.**

**2560** "If you knew the gift of God!" The wonder of prayer is revealed beside the well where we come seeking water: there, Christ comes to meet every human being. It is he who first seeks us and asks us for a drink. Jesus thirsts; his asking arises from the depths of God's desire for us. Whether we realize it or not, prayer is the encounter of God's thirst with ours. God thirsts that we may thirst for him.

**2565** In the New Covenant, prayer is the living relationship of the children of God with their Father who is good beyond measure, with his Son Jesus Christ and with the Holy Spirit. The grace of the Kingdom is "the union of the entire holy and royal Trinity . . . with the whole human spirit." Thus, the life of prayer is the habit of being in the presence of the thrice-holy God and in communion with him. This communion of life is always possible because, through Baptism, we have already been united with Christ. Prayer is Christian insofar as it is communion with Christ and extends throughout the Church, which is his Body. Its dimensions are those of Christ's love.

**2644** The Holy Spirit who teaches the Church and recalls to her all that Jesus said also instructs her in the life of prayer, inspiring new expressions of the same basic forms of prayer: blessing, petition, intercession, thanksgiving, and praise.

**2700** Through his Word, God speaks to man. By words, mental or vocal, our prayer takes flesh. Yet it is most important that the heart should be present to him to whom we are speaking in prayer: “Whether or not our prayer is heard depends not on the number of words, but on the fervor of our souls.”

**2705** Meditation is above all a quest. The mind seeks to understand the why and how of the Christian life, in order to adhere and respond to what the Lord is asking. The required attentiveness is difficult to sustain. We are usually helped by books, and Christians do not want for them: the Sacred Scriptures, particularly the Gospels, holy icons, liturgical texts of the day or season, writings of the spiritual fathers, works of spirituality, the great book of creation, and that of history - the page on which the "today" of God is written.

**2709** What is contemplative prayer? St. Teresa answers: "Contemplative prayer [*oracion mental*] in my opinion is nothing else than a close sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with him who we know loves us." Contemplative prayer seeks him "whom my soul loves." It is Jesus, and in him, the Father. We seek him, because to desire him is always the beginning of love, and we seek him in that pure faith which causes us to be born of him and to live in him. In this inner prayer we can still meditate, but our attention is fixed on the Lord himself.

Scripture: Background Information

## Mark 1:35-38 Jesus prays

 A remarkable scene – Jesus goes out to a lonely place to pray at a very early hour “long before dawn” (1:35). Why? Does he just want peace and quiet? Does he want to pray? Perhaps it is a combination of all these. His friends come after him and find him, only to tell him about more people who are looking for him! Despite what Jesus may be feeling – still tired or refreshed by his prayer, he moves on to extend his mission to all of Galilee.

We can pray in different ways. Just sitting quietly to listen can be prayer. How did Jesus actually pray in this passage? We do not really know. Did he use words? Did he use silence? Did he walk a lot and look at nature around him in the moonlight? Did he quietly contemplate the sunrise? We are not told and can only guess.

A useful form of prayer is the Ignatian method and this can be done in the classroom with students or staff room with adults. Simply choose a gospel scene like this one. Settle the group with some relaxation or breathing exercises. Read the text aloud and then invite the participants to imagine the scene. You will need to lead them by verbally creating a scenario. It might be: “Quietly follow Jesus to this lonely place and silently be with him there”. Set the scene for them. “Is it by the Lake of Galilee or the river Jordan or on a quiet road or in a field? Are there flowers, grass, trees? Is it summer or winter? Is it hot or cold? Is there a warm gentle breeze? Are there birds?” There are endless possibilities. Allow time for the participants to really be there - silent pauses are necessary. Perhaps towards the end Jesus notices them and speaks to them. What does he say? What do they say? This can be an effective form of prayer for some people but may not suit others. We need to be aware of this and ask those who find it difficult to accept this for the sake of others. Their type of prayer will come another day!

## Matthew 18:19-20 Prayer in common

Prayer can be so easy. Simply gathering in Jesus’ name is prayer – be it in a school, a classroom, a staffroom, at home or in the church – Jesus is with us. This text is in the context of Matthew’s chapter on the community. It is like a rule for the early Christians, and for us. It touches on so many issues concerning community: leadership, mediation of conflict, unconditional forgiveness, and the importance of the child in us all. This short passage could be used to practise another method of prayer called the Benedictine method or *lectio divina*. Again, as with the Ignatian method above, settle the group with relaxation and/or breathing exercises. The passage is then read aloud followed by a time of silence just to sit with the words. It is read again aloud and this time participants are invited to say only a word or phrase that touched them. This may take a little time, as people are often shy to speak. So give ample time. The same text is read a third time and the group is invited to form prayers around their reflections on the text - aloud or silently. The exercise can simply end with this third section or a prayer could be said together to conclude.

## Luke 10:38–42 Martha and Mary

The journey of Jesus into Jerusalem provides the context for the encounter between Martha and Jesus. Martha offered Jesus hospitality by welcoming him into her home. Here Jesus is among friends. Mary’s relationship with Jesus is straightforward: sitting at the feet of Jesus and soaking up every word. It is one sign of a disciple. Her relationship with Jesus, one of disciple and rabbi, is a statement about the manner in which Jesus welcomed women. This may be viewed as challenging to a society in which women were denied many opportunities. Meanwhile her sister bustles around as a conscientious host. Perhaps she is caught up in the role that culture and tradition had assigned to women. This story reminds us what is most important: listening to Jesus and allowing his message of love to permeate our lives. Jesus does not accept the solution of Martha but chides her for being distracted. The double naming, “Martha, Martha”, by Jesus is reminiscent of “Abraham! Abraham!” (Genesis 21:1), “Moses! Moses!” (Exodus 3:4), “Saul! Saul!” (Acts 9:24). In each of these instances the double naming of an individual is symbolic of their call.

So it is appropriate to interpret Jesus’ naming “Martha, Martha”, as a call into discipleship. Martha is being called out of a traditional role into new possibilities. This fits Luke’s portrait of Jesus as transforming the world. Jesus ushers in a new way of being.[[1]](#footnote-1)

The familiar story of Mary and Martha is sometimes interpreted as an argument for the preference of the contemplative life (Mary) over the active life (Martha). Mary was sitting at Jesus’ feet listening to Jesus with the men, which in that culture would have been unusual. Thus both Jesus and Mary are challenging a societal custom of their times. This could be worrying Martha who is serving the food, we presume. Surely serving is a good thing so why does Jesus seem to challenge her when she complains about Mary? We are told in the text that she is distracted by all the serving (v 40). She is over anxious and not enjoying the serving. If you want to sit with Mary, do so. If you want to work, do so. But whatever you choose, do it happily, not anxiously. ‘Do not fret, Martha’, he seems to be saying. ‘Stop worrying.’ He is not questioning her choice of work but her anxiety.

The Church’s Teaching and Lived Tradition

***To Know, Worship and Love* Year 4, p132,** **Living the Gospel**

*St Ignatius of Antioch, St Teresa of Avila, St John Vianney.*

Many of the saints spent their life in prayer. Here are some of their thoughts on prayer:

*Give yourself to prayer continually* (St Ignatius of Antioch).

*There is only one way to find God and that is by prayer* (St Teresa of Avila).

*The more we pray the more we wish to pray* (St John Vianney).

Many of the saints devoted their life to prayer and provide examples of prayer that are models for us.[[2]](#footnote-2)

**Prayer in our Christian Tradition**

Throughout the centuries of Christian tradition men and women have been drawn to prayer. God calls us first and gives us the desire to seek God. A condition of our humanity is that we desire to seek connection with others, including God. God is in our desire to reach out. It is possible to seek God within ourselves, others and the world around us. When we enter into Christian prayer in all its forms we enter the place where the sacred and the mystical awareness of God find common ground in our lives. There are three main expressions of prayer in our Christian Tradition: vocal prayer, meditation and contemplative prayer.

**Vocal Prayer**

Vocal prayer is an external expression of words addressed to God. Verbal prayer can be formal and informal.

- Formal prayer (eg Our Father, Hail Mary, Creed, etc)

- Informal prayer where we pray simply using our own words

**Meditation**

Meditation is a quiet and reflective personal conversation with God. In this form of prayer we engage our thought, imagination, emotion, and desire. Often people meditate on Scripture texts and spiritual writings, icons and so forth. Meditation requires attentiveness.

**Contemplative Prayer**

Contemplative prayer is silent presence with God, an awareness of God. In contemplative prayer the person enters into a silence and is attentive in the presence of God. It is a prayer of being with God. In the words of St Teresa, “Contemplative prayer in my opinion is nothing else than a close sharing between friends, it means taking time frequently to be alone with him who we know loves us.”

Celebration: Prayer and Liturgy

**Celebration is a key part of Religious Education. The following suggestions provide opportunities throughout the unit for celebration in prayer and liturgy. Most of these suggestions are included as ‘teaching/learning’ activities in Unit Content sections.**

The best way to learn about prayer is to experience prayer. This unit is predominantly prayer experiences. The students pray using the following forms / styles:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| \* Guided Meditation | \* Prayer through action/service | \* Psalms |
| \* Contemplation/Lectio Divina | \* Movement | \* Photos and pictures |
| \* Communal prayer | \* Song and music | \* Prayer journal |
| (Liturgy of the Word) | \* Aspiration | \* Repetition chant (mantra) |
|  | \* Mandala |  |

Use a variety of vocal prayer, meditation and contemplation. In practising verbal prayer use the formal prayers of our Tradition: Our Father, Hail Mary, The Rosary, Creeds … There are many other styles of prayer. See the books in the Resources list for more ideas.

Assessment

**Interim Assessment Statement 2014**

The identification of Teaching/Learning strategies as ‘suggested assessment’ has been removed from the 3-6 RE curriculum. The type of assessment activity and the way evidence of learning is gathered will vary, depending on such factors as; the outcomes being assessed, the evidence being gathered, the teaching and learning activity, context and students’ learning needs (NSW Board of Studies, <http://syllabus.bos.nsw.edu.au/support-materials/k-6-assessment-strategies/>) .

Assessment in Religious Education is based on the same principles as in other key learning areas. Please refer to the CEO Sydney site supporting the implementation of the Australian Curriculum in the context of the NSW BOS Syllabus. At this site <https://sites.google.com/a/syd.catholic.edu.au/professional-learning-modules/home> professional learning modules are provided to support teachers as they engage with the NSW BOS Syllabuses for the Australian Curriculum.

**Module 4, Assessment and Planning** explores the principles of effective assessment ***for***, ***as*** and ***of*** learning and considers a range of strategies and methods for assessing student learning. Activities focus on moving beyond assessment as an index of learning, towards assessment that motivates, enhances learning and achieves deeper understanding to meet the diverse learning needs of all as students. Participants are encouraged to reflect on assessment as a driver for improvement in teaching and learning.

**Religious Education Curriculum and Assessment**

In Year 3-6 Religious Education Curriculum, both Syllabus Outcomes and Classroom Outcomes are key reference points for decisions about students’ progress and achievement. Classroom outcomes are more specific to the unit content. Unit Content statement and *Students will learn* statements in each unit should also be taken into account in planning and developing learning and assessment opportunities. Outcomes and Unit Content Statements are derived from Syllabus objectives.

Effective Religious Education involves teaching the Catholic faith (Scripture, doctrine, traditions, prayer and sacraments) and nurturing the faith of the child. There is no attempt to assess the child’s faith. Assessment is concerned with skills, knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith taught in the curriculum and supported in the religious life of the school.

Resources

***To Know Worship and Love* - Year 4, Chapter 16, (2003), James Goold House Publications, Melbourne, Victoria**

**Books**

Bretherton B, (1998), *Praying With Children: A Resource Book for Primary Teachers*, Social Science Press, NSW

Casey M, (1995), *Towards God: The Western Tradition of Contemplation*, Dove, Victoria

Catholic Education Office, Bathurst, (1998), *Breathing Life into the RE Classroom: Creative Teaching Strategies for Religious Education*, Bathurst NSW

Catholic Mission, (1995), *The Prayer Box I,* Catholic Mission, Ashfield NSW

Catholic Mission, (1996), *The Prayer Box II,* Catholic Mission, Ashfield NSW

(Prayer Resource Kits. Both boxes have a wealth of interesting prayer experiences.)

Duckett M, (1992), *Secret Places Sacred Paths: Understanding Prayer in Our World Today*, Collins Dove, Victoria

Hall T, (1988), *Too Deep For Words: Rediscovering Lectio Divina*, Paulist Press, New York

Halverson D, (1989), *Teaching Prayer in the Classroom: Experiences for Children and Youth*, Albingdon Press, Nashville

Lindbergh R,(2000), *In Every Tiny Grain of Sand: A Child’s Book of Prayers and Praise*, Walker Books, London

Nolan B, (1999), *Prayer Strategies: A Teacher’s Manual*, Harper Collins, Melbourne

Reehorst J, (1986), *Guided Meditations for Children*, Brown-Roa, Iowa USA

Reehorst J, (1991), *Guided Meditations for Children 2*, Brown-Roa, Iowa USA

Sasso S, (1994), *In God’s Name,* Jewish Light Publishing, Woodstock Vermont

Smith M sgs, *Children’s Daily Prayer: Under the Southern Cross,* LTP & Des Books

Key to Symbol

✪ denotes higher order activity

Unit Content 1

Communication is the basis of building a relationship with others.

*Students will learn:*

* about the importance of communication in relationships
* about God’s relationship with us
* to use journaling as a form of prayer

Unit Content: Background Information

It is important here to spend some time exploring the concepts of relationship and communication. Use literature and students’ life experience to bring out the link between communication and relationship; and their importance in our lives. In the same way we need relationships with each other (we are oriented to community) we need relationship with God. It is God who calls us to relationship with God. In a way God desires to have a relationship with us/me. We respond to this invitation by prayer. Prayer is the communication with God that helps us develop our relationship.

**What is Prayer?**

Put simply, prayer is communication with God, it is a dialogue (speaking and listening and silence), it is being with God, being aware of God, sitting in the presence of God. Thus it is developing our relationship with the God who calls us to relationship. Prayer is entering the unseen reality of our lives. Through prayer I come to a deeper awareness of God and myself. Prayer is a gift from God. Prayer comes naturally, yet it does not come easily. Prayer is a natural human response to a loving God. It is deeply human and deeply religious.

A ‘living relationship’ is an excellent description of prayer. In a living relationship, wife and husband, sisters and brothers, friends, speak to one another, freely, openly, without fear. In a living relationship, those in love are present to one another, even when they do not use words. Prayer is thus ‘the habit of being in the presence’ of the Holy Trinity, the ‘practice of the presence of God’. Especially in silent prayer, meditation and reflection, we can easily discover the gentle gift of communion with our God.[[3]](#footnote-3)

When exposing students to prayer experiences remember to include movement, posture, gesture, symbols and incense. They are all an important part of our rich tradition. Prayer can engage all the senses.

**Image of God**

The Bible is full of wonderful images of God. Each image communicates something of God. For example: a majestic God, father, our shelter, a mother who comforts, a gardener… The Catholic Tradition is rich in imagery of God from the bible and the spiritual classics. The image of God that a person best identifies with is inspired by the person’s tradition and experience. A person’s image of God can change depending on current needs, age, faith level, prayer life and experience. The important point to be aware of is that no image is adequate, as God is more than any human image. All images are useful as they help us enter into relationship with God. Students need to be exposed to the images of God presented by our tradition. They also need to be free to explore their own images of God. Our images of God are inspired by God who constantly invites us into relationship.

**Prayer Journal**

Journaling is a form of prayer that has a long tradition in our Church. Many spiritual teachers used journals: St John of the Cross, St Teresa of Avila. Prayer journaling can be writing thoughts and feelings, a dialogue with God, poetry, or any writing that helps us pray. In this unit students experience writing prayer journals as communicating with God and as a form of reflecting about their prayer experiences and insights. Give students time to write in the prayer journals regularly. This may be free and spontaneous writing at times and other times directed in response to an experience or question.

Suggested Teaching/Learning Strategies

* Use the wallpaper discussion process to respond to the question: What is prayer? (*Breathing Life into the RE Classroom*, p42). Come back to this discussion periodically throughout the unit. Allow students to add and take away comments.
* Read KWL, Year 4, p128-129. Discuss and use this information to improve the definition of prayer.
* Use children’s literature to explore communication and relationship. Relate this to prayer.
* In groups, students brainstorm and present to the class:

- What is communication?

- With whom do we communicate?

- How do we communicate with God?

- Why do we communicate with God?

- What is “relationship”?

- How do we build up relationships with God?

Students share their work with the class. They could do this by using a mind-map. Make sure students have a clear understanding of the link between communication, relationship and God.

* Students write prayers of petition asking God for assistance in building a relationship with God and following Jesus. Use prayers in a class liturgy or prayer asking for help to be good communicators and build healthy relationships with God and others.
* Present the doctrinal statements on A3 sheets with the question underneath, ‘How is this evident in my life’? Students complete a ‘Pass the Parcel’ process. Comments reviewed as a class. Complete one activity from those listed below for each theme:

(a) Communication with God (b) Relationship with God

- Design posters.

- Write a pamphlet to give information.

- Write a poem.

- Write a prayer.

**Images of God**

* Read and discuss *In God’s Name* by Sandy Sasso. Discuss the images of God presented.
* What images of God are there in the bible? In groups, students complete Resource Sheet 1.
* Use Photolanguage images and ask the students to choose a picture that gives them an image of God in their life. Teacher needs to also choose a picture. Students share picture with a sentence. Explain to students that people have different images of God. These stem from their religious tradition and their own experience. Students illustrate and write about their own image (or images) of God.

**Prayer Journal (Vocal Prayer)**

* Discuss with students what a prayer journal is. (*Prayer Strategies,* p94 or *Breathing Life,* p138. Also see Unit Content 1 Background Information).
* Students may design an attractive title page using a verse from scripture or a prayer line.
* A few times a week give students time to write in the prayer journal. Basically this is writing to God.
* Brainstorm some sentence stems and beginners that students may use. For example:

God, I praise you for …

Jesus, thank you for … Thank you, Lord God …

Jesus, please remember …

Holy Spirit, sometimes I wonder …

Lord, I feel … I believe … I thank you for …

Sometimes I wonder …

* At times you may wish the students to answer a question or focus on a theme in their prayer journal. You may want to direct the writing after leading them through different styles of prayer, ie Tell God how a meditation exercise was for you. What is your image of God? Respond to a Scripture passage.
* Read KWL Year 4, p132-133. What can be added to the wallpaper discussion on prayer? Find information about St Teresa of Avila, St Ignatius of Antioch, St Catherine of Siena and St John Vianney. How did these saints pray? How did prayer affect their lives? What do they teach us about prayer?
* Use songs and published mantras for prayer. Students may want to respond with spontaneous prayers of intercession.
* Create movement to accompany songs and formal prayers.

Unit Content 2

We can communicate with God through prayer. Jesus teaches us how to pray in different situations.

*Students will learn:*

* about Jesus as a man of prayer
* to recognise that we can follow Jesus’ example of prayer and action

Unit Content: Background Information

In prayer Jesus uses the term ‘abba’ (father) to refer to God. ‘Father’ is Jesus’ image of God and shows intimate relationship. We can readily see that prayer was so much a part of Jesus’ life that his life became a prayer. His life is a prayerful response to the will of his Father. We are called to the same prayerfulness. Prayer nourishes us and sustains us in our everyday life.

Jesus used the Jewish sacred scripture of his time. We too use our sacred scripture to pray. One way of doing this is through **meditation**. Meditation seeks to understand the why and how of life and God. It engages our intellect and imagination as well as our emotions and heart. In meditation we read and we are attentive to the scriptures (or any spiritual writing). Casey (1995, p102) writes, “meditation is rather like respiration; we have probably been doing it all our lives without using the term”. It is natural yet not easy.

When giving students an experience of Guided Meditation, as with any prayer form, it is important to be aware that prayer is not taught or learned but rather experienced. Prayer is a gift from God who initiates and takes an active role. For this reason allow students time to evaluate what happens for them in the different experiences. A person’s ability to enter into a way of praying will depend on personality, readiness, openness to God in that time and place, and God’s desire. What is important is that students have an appreciation for the various prayer traditions in our Church, and develop a desire and routine for prayer. Hopefully they will begin to discover their own way of praying, the prayer that best nurtures their relationship with God.

The reading in Matthew (18:19-20) tells us that Jesus Christ is present whenever we gather in his name and what we pray for in his name will be granted. The purpose of prayer is not to make a list of requests for God to grant us. We pray for the good of all creation. We pray so that we can grow in our relationship with God. This relationship will direct us in our vocation and mission.

Suggested Teaching/Learning Strategies

* Read Matthew 18:19-20. Wonder with students:

I wonder why Jesus says he is present when two or more gather.

I wonder when people come together in Jesus’ name.

I wonder what Jesus is really saying in these two verses.

* **Liturgy of the Word: Communal Prayer**. Students have already looked at the Liturgy of the Word in the Easter Unit. Review it briefly.
* Read Mark 1:35-38. Wonder with students:

I wonder why Jesus chose to pray in a deserted place while it was still dark.

I wonder what Jesus did in the deserted place.

I wonder if you have a deserted place you like to go.

I wonder how Jesus felt when Simon and the disciples found him and said, “Everyone is searching for you”.

* The teacher models a prayer service for the class: preparation and celebration of the prayer service. Use the doctrine in the prayer celebration.

- Organise the class into small groups (two or three students) and provide adequate resources for students to use. As a resource, include the book KWL. The section throughout the chapters in ‘In Tradition’ and ‘Our Prayer’ can be used in prayer, particularly p131. Other Prayers of the Catholic tradition may include: Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be, Angelus, Rosary… Use formal vocal prayers.

* Students prepare a short class prayer service focussing on Jesus’ teachings and their living faith. Students present their prayer services over the following few weeks. Students use a variety of published prayers and songs, and may include their own prayers and work from activities throughout the unit.
* Students investigate Jewish worship at the Synagogue. The Catholic liturgy was modelled on the Jewish Sabbath liturgy. Compare this with our Liturgy of the Word. A possible resource for this is the Synagogue in Sydney. In groups, students develop questions about Jewish and Catholic Worship.
* Use prayers from the Jewish tradition, especially the psalms, for class prayer.

**Guided Meditation**:

* Using a dictionary, students define meditation. Students then define Christian meditation. What is the purpose of meditation? Lead the students to see that meditation is a form of prayer.
* Lead students in a guided meditation using Mark1:35-38. (See *Guided Meditations for Children* for examples). After leading the students through a relaxation exercise begin the meditation. Read the text slowly. Set the scene: “You are in that ‘lonely place’. What do you see? There is a cool gentle morning breeze … You see Jesus … The sun is just beginning to rise …” (allow time for students to visualize the scene.) “Listen to the quiet early morning noises. A bird softly sings … There are distant sounds …” (Then ask students to engage Jesus.) “You move towards Jesus and he notices you… He welcomes you and you sit together … You have a conversation … What do you say to Jesus? What does Jesus say? How do you feel as you speak to Jesus? (allow time for the conversation then gently begin to close the meditation) “It is time to go now, Simon is coming for Jesus … You finish your conversation and say goodbye … You walk away …. Be aware of how you are feeling… You are now back in the classroom ... Notice the noises … be aware of your body relaxed as you begin to wake up …”
* Before responding to the following questions, have a general discussion about the experience. How well did you enter the meditation? What did you find difficult? Easy? What happened for you? Assure the students that this form of prayer can be difficult to get into and some people find it easier than others. Students may need to spend some time responding to the meditation in a vocal prayer, prayer journal, or drawing a scene.
* **Our Father**: Read the reflection ‘Unit 4.7 Drama Resource’ on RE Online – Religious Education Primary under Primary Curriculum and Resources (taken from *The Prayer Box II* p20-21 with permission from Catholic Mission). Use two voices to perform this for the class. Discuss the dialogue between God and the person. (Prayer is a dialogue between God and the person.) Why was the person praying? What did God do? What does this reflection tell us about prayer and God? What is prayer? What change did you notice in the person?
* Students explore: How did the experience of prayer affect Jesus’ life? What indications do we have that Jesus was prayerful? Can you recall times and situations where Jesus prayed? (Students should at least be able to name the passion). How did prayer affect Jesus’ life? (Mark 1:38. Prayer gave Jesus a focus on his mission, strength and courage to do the will of his Father).

Unit Content 3

There are many different ways of praying and developing our relationship with God.

*Students will learn:*

* about different ways of praying
* to be aware of God’s presence in their lives
* to be aware that our attitudes and actions are influenced by praying

Unit Content: Background Information

The Christian religion has a rich tradition of prayer and spirituality. In this section there are two parts:

a) exploring contemplative prayer. Students are exposed to prayer experiences and exercises that build the ‘skills’ for contemplative prayer;

b) exploring and responding to the psalms in prayer.

**Contemplative Prayer**

**Contemplation** is different to meditation. Hall (1998, p9) describes meditation as a ‘reasoning process in which words, events etc., are prayerfully pondered...’while contemplation is a type of ‘resting in God, or a loving gaze…’. Lectio Divina is a rich form of prayer that uses both. In this form of prayer the person moves through meditation to contemplation. Lectio Divina is a continuum with four sections.

*Lectio*: I read a text, usually from sacred scripture.

*Meditatio*: I meditate on the text. Pondering the meaning prayerfully.

*Oratio*: I engage the text in prayer. Speaking and listening to God. Here contemplation begins as we pray from the heart.

*Contemplatio*: Here I sit in silence. I am still and present to the God who is present in me.

The experience of Lectio Divina with students will be at its simplest. For most students in Year 4 Lectio Divina may be too difficult. The above explanation is for teachers. If you feel comfortable with this style of prayer and wish to adapt it for use with students, do so. However, for most students prayer experiences and exercises that prepare students for contemplation are useful. Skills in being still and silent can prepare the way for prayer through contemplation.

In exploring the text about Martha and Mary it is important to read the ‘Scripture: Background Information’. Jesus is not making a preference for Mary who listens (contemplation) over Martha who is working. Both are valid responses. It is the anxiety that Jesus responds to. Whatever response we make to Jesus, it should be a joyful response. It is interesting to note the counter-cultural statement that Mary and Jesus make. Prayer can be transformative and ‘counter-cultural’. The journey of prayer and prayerfulness is not always predictable. The fruit of prayer is growth in our humanity. Sometimes we experience this as serenity and quiet peace. Sometimes we experience this as a challenge to change our actions and work for the kingdom of God. Either way, always remember that prayer is an action of God.

**Repetitive chants**, more commonly known as mantra, are a form of contemplative prayer using a short phrase or word. The person in prayer repeats the word or phrase over and over. This is meant to focus the person on prayer and God. Some traditional chants include: ‘Jesus, son of the living God, have mercy on me’, ‘Come, Lord Jesus’. Phrases and words from a text can be singled out and used as a chant. For example, while prayerfully reading a psalm, a verse may catch your attention. This verse can then be prayed as a repetitive chant. This phrase can stay with us over the next day or days.

**Aspiration**

This is a phrase recited throughout the day.

**The Psalms**

The psalms are a collection of religious poetry and prayers gathered together by the people of Israel. As a Jew, Jesus used them in prayer. Psalms express sorrow and joy, they plead for help as well as praise God and give God thanks for God’s many gifts. The psalms come from the heart and express the many emotions of the human spirit.

Expose the students to a variety of psalms and a variety of responses to them. Some psalms are suggested. Alternately, you may choose to use psalms as they are found in the lectionary (used in the liturgical cycle). As poems, the psalms can be studied using English strategies around poetry. The psalms are written to be sung. Explore psalms made into songs, put music and movement to them. Explore how we use the psalms in the Catholic tradition. Where are the psalms in the Mass?

Suggested Teaching/Learning Strategies

* Tell the story of Mary and Martha Lk 10:38-42 using concrete materials. See Resource Sheet 2 for suggested script.
* Engage students in wondering together.
* I wonder why Mary chose to sit and listen to Jesus.
* I wonder what Jesus was speaking about.
* I wonder why Jesus thought that Mary had made the better choice.
* I wonder what Jesus meant when he said “only one thing is really important”.
* I wonder what choice you would have made if you were there.
	+ **Repetitive Chants**

- Define what a chant is with students. In prayer use the Jesus Prayer. “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on me.” Repeat the sentence several times. Use reflective music in the background.

- Use chants composed by Monica Brown and other musicians.

- Students write their own chants and aspirations

* Read Luke 10:38-42 Mary and Martha. Retell the passage using Connected Statues. Use Six Hats to explore the passage. What is each of the characters doing? How does Martha feel? Why? How can we be like Martha? Mary? What does this story tell us about prayer? (Highlight that Jesus is not criticising the choices but Martha’s anxiety. Prayer can be contemplative listening, or acting (service) or a combination of both).
* Students finish the sentences:

- Like Martha, I can take up Jesus’ invitation by…

- Like Mary, I can listen to Jesus by…

* Service to one another can be a form of prayer and a response to prayer. Begin a personal mindmap on action (things we do in our life) as prayer. For example: spending some time in quiet, helping an elderly friend, forgiving others, setting the dinner table to help your parents… Students design a poster to promote prayer through action/service. Students should be given a regular time each week during the unit to reflect, modify or add to their mindmap.
* **Awareness and stillness exercise**

- Settle the students into a sitting position, on their chairs and with both feet on the floor, hands on laps. Lead them through a relaxation exercise to relax their bodies.

- Tell the students to focus on their breathing rhythm without changing it – be natural. Be aware of your breathing. Give them a few minutes in the stillness.

- Ask them to imagine breathing the Holy Spirit in with each breath.

- End the exercise by bringing them back to awareness of noises in the room and slowly moving back to classroom places.

* + - **Prayer through silence**

- Begin by settling the students into a stillness. Focus their attention on a candle or symbols.

- Encourage them to relax and focus. (It is important to direct their focus. Some may experience this as meditation, others contemplation.)

- Focus on the candle or symbol…. What is it? What meaning does it have for you?

- When they are still and silent, ask them to close their eyes and focus on God. You may wish to direct students focus to qualities or ideas, for example, the warmth of God. How they feel the presence of God…

**Using The Psalms in Prayer**

* Introduce students to the psalms by asking them to find the Book of Psalms in the Bible. Begin with KWL Year 4, p133 ‘Did you Know’ dot point 3. Draw out from students what they know about the psalms. If it has not been nominated, explain that the psalms are songs, poems collected over time by the Hebrew people. They are prayers. Explain that Jesus used these prayers in his life.
* In groups, students present Psalm 22 reflectively with a visual strategy such as ektographic slides, PowerPoint, visual overlay. What is the experience of the composer of this psalm? Of whom does this psalm remind you? Read v1: where have we heard these words before? (see Matthew 27:46). Why does Jesus use this phrase? (Jesus was familiar with the psalm and used the line because it captured how he felt). What other parallels are there between this psalm and the accounts of Jesus? Do one of the activities listed below in response to this psalm.
	+ - Use a variety of psalms in prayer. Teachers to choose psalms and a selection of activities as time permits. It is not necessary to cover all 10 activities or all psalms.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Psalms of praise | 8, 95, 104, 122, 135,  | (Here are some suggested psalms. There are many others that can be used. Note: You need to read the psalms to make sure they are suitable for your group of students.) |
| Psalms of thanks | 66, 92, 116 |
| Psalms of petition | 63, 70, 130, 142 |
| Psalms of sorrow | 32, 51, 22 |
| Others | 93, 121 |

- Put psalm to pictures to create a visual prayer (posters, photo cards, power-point etc).

- Mandala: (See *Prayer Strategies* p66 or *Breathing Life*, p132.) Draw a mandala in response to a psalm read in a meditation exercise.

- Sing a psalm for prayer. Many hymns we use in liturgies or with students are based on the psalms.

- Create a movement to a psalm. (This can be to a psalm read slowly, or a psalm put into song. Many hymns are adaptations of psalms.)

- Use a psalm in meditation and/or Lectio Divina.

- Respond to a psalm using prayer journals.

- Create a symbol after reading a psalm.

- Choose a verse from a psalm and design a bookmark, prayer pamphlet or poster.

- Write a prayer inspired by a psalm.

- Explore the mood, language, structure of a psalm. What does it say about God, people and the world?

Unit Content 4

**Prayer can express different feelings and attitudes: praise, thanks, sorrow and petition.**

*Students will learn:*

* about prayers of praise, sorrow, thanks and petition
* to write their own psalm and/or prayers

Unit Content: Background Information

Prayer engages the whole person. In this section students will be asked to write prayers. In doing so, keep in mind that prayer is a response to God’s spirit within us. It is the Spirit of God deep within us that allows us to pray. Before writing, students should be exposed to a variety of written prayers. It is also important to consider what written prayers communicate. If we are always asking for ‘a sunny day’, ‘a safe excursion’; are we developing the image of a magic god that constantly intervenes? Prayer doesn’t change the world. Nor does God ‘grant’ every petition. In prayers of petition, what are we asking for and what does it say about our image of God? (Refer to CCC2734-2737 for more information). Prayer changes the person who prays. In being transformed by our prayer we then go out and change the world. It is God’s initiative that calls us to pray and transforms us through prayer. Action and prayer are intertwined.

In writing psalms and prayers go through a process: a) expose the students to a variety of psalms and prayers. b) Provide stimulus, through experience or reflection or discussion. c) Model planning, writing, and reviewing. d) Joint construction. e) Individual writing.

Suggested Teaching/Learning Strategies

* **Writing and Sharing Vocal Prayer:** Why do people pray? What is the purpose of prayer? Students spend some time responding to the question individually, then in twos and groups. Add to personal mindmap.
* Students use dictionaries to define the words: praise, thanks, petition and sorrow (penitential). Under each word put examples. Students classify psalms and prayers into the four types.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Praise** | **Thanks** | **Petition** | **Sorrow** |
|  |  |  |  |

* Look at and discuss different types of prayers so that students have a good understanding of structures of prayers. (Not all prayer is structured. Prayer can be a spontaneous talking to God.)
* Students write prayers of praise, thanks, petition, and sorrow. Decide: Title of God, type, topic. (Resource Sheet 3 may be useful here.)

For example: Title of God – Creator God

 Type – (praise) All praise be to you

 Topic – (sunset) For the beauty of the sky at sunset. With its various colours and shades of blue and orange and yellow. It is a glimpse of your great beauty.

* Students write a psalm (Choose what type: praise, thanks, petition, sorrow). Spend some lessons preparing students. Teacher needs to model writing a psalm. Create word banks, plan etc (as would be done in the study of text types).
* Share the prayers and psalms students wrote during reflection time or a prayer celebration. Use Taize mantras in between each prayer or psalm.
* Creatively present prayers and psalms.

 **Resource Sheet 1**

**God is described in each of these pieces of Scripture in a different way. What is the image of God presented in each passage?**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Psalm 104:1-4**Bless the Lord, my soul,Lord my God, how great you are!Clothed in majesty and glory,Wrapped in a robe of light! | **Isaiah 64:8**And yet Lord you are my Father;We the clay, you the potter,We are all the work of your hand. |
| **Psalm 31:1**In you Lord I take shelter.  | **Isaiah 66:13**Like a son comforted by his motherWill I comfort you? |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Ask some people you know** **how they like to think of God.** | **What are some of your favourite names for God? Why?** |
|  |  |

**Use some of these names for God and write your own psalm. You can make it a prayer of thanks, praise, petition or sorrow.**

 (Adapted from KWL, Teaching Companion, 3a, p50)

**Resource Sheet 2**

martha and mary

 (Luke 10:38–42)

**You will need:**

* Beige felt underlay and brown felt road
* Figures: Jesus, two disciples, Martha and Mary
* Block to represent a table
* Bible

*Students are seated in a semi-circle ready to listen to the story. When the children are settled, get the materials and carry them respectfully to the storytelling place as you would the Bible. Place these beside you and say:*

**The Lord be with you.**

Students: **And also with you.**

*Place class Bible, open at Luke, in front of you with your hand on it.*

**This story comes from the Gospel according to Luke, which is in the New Testament section of the Bible.**

*Place Bible beside you. Roll out the beige underlay. Place the road on top of the underlay. Place the block off to the side of the road.*

*Place Martha to one side of the road. Move Jesus and the disciples down the road towards her. Turn Jesus to face Martha. Move the disciples further down the road and then take them off the story mat.*

**One day Jesus and his disciples entered a certain village. A woman named Martha welcomed Jesus into her home.**

*Move Jesus over to Martha. Move them both sideways from the road. Move Jesus a little way away from the table. Move Martha over to the table.*

**Martha began to work on her many tasks.**

*Move Mary to the front of Jesus.*

**Martha’s sister, Mary, sat at the feet of Jesus and listened intently to what he was saying.**

*Move Martha from the table. Move her around the space and back to the table. Take your time, do this twice.*

**While Mary was listening to Jesus, Martha continued with her work.**

*Move Martha to stand beside her sister, in front of Jesus.*

**After a while Martha said, “Jesus, my sister has left me to do *all* the work by myself! Please tell her to help me!”**

*Turn Jesus to face Martha.*

**Jesus said to her, “Martha, Martha, You are worried and distracted over so many things when only one thing is really needed”.**

*Turn Jesus to face Mary.*

**“Mary has made the better choice and it must not be taken from her.”**

**This is the Gospel of the Lord.**

Students: **Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ.**

*Pause quietly for a moment and then begin to wonder together.*

**Wondering:**

I wonder why Mary chose to sit and listen to Jesus.

I wonder what Jesus was speaking about.

I wonder why Jesus thought that Mary had made the better choice.

I wonder what Jesus meant when he said “only one thing is really important”.

I wonder what choice you would have made if you were there.

 **Resource Sheet 3**

**Compose a prayer using one or more of the creative methods listed:**

… drama, mime, movement, dance, song, painting, PowerPoint, sculpture, modeling, poetry, etc.

**Plan your prayers in the boxes below:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **MY PRAYER OF SORROW** | **MY PRAYER OF PRAISE** |
| **MY PRAYER OF PETITION** | **MY PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING** |

(Adapted from KWL, Teaching Companion, 4b, p142)

1. KWL, Teaching Companion, 3b, p158 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. KWL, Teaching Companion, 3b, p157 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)